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LUDVIG HOLBERG.

PART II.

WE now approach the most fruitful period of Holberg's activity, the creative period that gave to Denmark a national stage and to universal literature a series of comedies that can be classed with those of Molière alone. The comedies of Aristophanes and Shakspere are, of course, out of court. They constitute a distinct literary species with a divineness all its own. "Therefore on [them] no speech," slightly to alter Landor's apology for disregarding Shakspere in a similar case. We cannot consider "The Birds" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream" apart from their poetry, and of poetry there is little question with Molière, none with Holberg. But if the comedies of Holberg contain no poetry, they exhibit a superabundance of life in all of the forms in which it appeared to the experienced and keen-sighted Copenhagener. They picture a world (a small one, it is true, but still a world) in all of its social aspects. Merely as documents, they are of the highest value. Just as the France of the Restoration might be reconstructed from "La Comédie Humaine," were all other records lost, so the Denmark of the early eighteenth century might be reconstructed from "Den Danske Skue-Plads." Few are the ages of which anything like this may be said, for few are the men of genius sufficiently comprehensive thus to place upon record "the body of the time" in which they have lived.

The external history of Holberg's comedies may be briefly summarized. Frederick IV., who was a liberal-minded king, as has already been shown by his protection of Hol-

berg from the attacks of his enemies, was fond of theatrical amusements—a taste acquired during a long foreign sojourn as Crown Prince—and entertained both the French and Italian player troupes at his court. In 1721 these were replaced by a German company. The French players, unwilling to leave Copenhagen, got a license to build a theatre of their own. The building was erected and opened to the public in 1722. But the venture was not successful, and the enterprise came near being abandoned, when it occurred to René Montaigu, one of the actors, to try the experiment of producing Danish plays in the Danish language. The idea was a novel one, but it found approval, and nothing stood in the way of carrying it out except the trifling fact that there were no Danish plays. In this emergency, the university professor, now known to be the author of "Peder Paars," was called upon to provide some. After no little hesitation, he consented, and soon had a batch of five comedies ready for the players. They were received by the public with great enthusiasm. Others followed in rapid succession, until no less than twenty-eight had been produced, all within a period of about five years. When we consider the technical finish of these comedies, their wealth of invention and humor, and the variety of the figures that live and breathe in their pages, we must reckon their production as one of the most astonishing things in the history of literature, as comparable only with the output of the more active years of Scott, Dumas, and Lope de Vega. In 1728 Copenhagen was almost wholly destroyed by fire, and there was an end of theatre going. In 1730 Christian VI., whose disposition was as puritanical as that of his predecessor had been liberal, came to the throne, and, during his reign of sixteen years, there was no question of play acting. In 1747, under Frederick V., the theatre was once more opened, and Holberg wrote six new plays for it, making thirty-four in all. These plays, to which the author himself gave the collective name, "Den Danske Skue-Plads" (The Danish Stage), are the most important contribution yet made by the Scandinavian genius to literature.

To the student of Shakspere or of Molière the chronological order of the plays is a matter of the highest consequence. To the student of Holberg it is of no consequence whatever. That is, there are not in his case those well-defined periods of creative activity and that progressive development in style and dramatic force that we find in the cases of Shakspere and Molière. In passing from "Love's Labor's Lost" to "The Tempest," we pass from exuberant youth, through tried and chastened manhood, to the ripe wisdom of age, and we feel something similar in passing from "L'Etourdi" to "Le Malade Imaginaire." But on reading Holberg's comedies from first to last we get no such impression. In fact, the very first of them all is as finished and mature a production as any of those that come after. About the only distinction to be made (and that is a distinction hardly worth making) is between the six comedies of the later period and the twenty-eight of the earlier. The intervening score of years, spent in writing of a more serious sort, seems to have taken from the author's hand something of its cunning, and none of the best examples of his work dates from the second period. Hence for purposes of study we are free to group them as we will, and various classifications have been proposed. Perhaps we cannot now do better than adopt a suggestion made by Skavlan, and first separate the comedies of the fantastic and allegorical sort from those which deal with actual life and present only possible characters to our view.

Six pieces out of thirty-four may be thus disposed of, and among them "Plutus," a work of the author's aftermath, is of the first importance. Holberg thought it "bore the palm" over all his other comedies, but this is a judgment in which criticism has not concurred, although freely recognizing the humor and deep insight of the play. For one thing, it is too closely imitative of the "Plutus" of Aristophanes. It is interesting to note, parenthetically, that Holberg's last comedy of importance deals with the theme and has the title of the last work produced by the great comic poet of Athens. In both plays, the God of Riches comes to town, is restored to

sight by Æsculapius, and bestows his gifts with what he supposes to be great discrimination, but only, as the sequel shows, with deplorable results. And in both plays, Poverty, who preaches the harmfulness of wealth, is first driven forth with contumely, and afterwards brought back in triumph. In "Republiqven" (The Republic) the author's satire is aimed at those visionaries who fancy that the adoption of their ideas would at once usher in the millennium, and whose fantastic proposals are worthy of the philosophers of Laputa. The Republic, or Commonwealth, is personified as a woman, who offers her only daughter in marriage to the one who shall devise the most important scheme for the welfare of the state. All sorts of plans are presented for her consideration, and all sorts of political and other nostrums offered in competition for the prize. One of these nostrums is an *elixir vitæ* which the old lady tries upon herself to such effect that she conceives a violent aversion to all schemers, and bestows her daughter upon a worthy young man whose pretensions have hitherto met with scorn. The moral of the piece (for the moral never lacks explicit statement in the comedies of Holberg) is placed upon the lips of this young man, and is worth quoting as a specimen of the simply but admirably expressed common sense so characteristic of the author's work. "We cannot hold them all for cheats, for many imagine themselves to be what they are not. And the lofty opinion they entertain of themselves arises merely from ignorance; for, the more heedless one is, the easier everything seems to him. Clear-sighted people, on the other hand, who look deep into things, and notice the difficulties therein hidden, do not venture to meddle with them. We find, in consequence, that the former usually display the greater activity, for everything seems possible to their ignorance. The latter, on the other hand, pass for incapable and timid, and are therefore looked upon with scorn; yet their timidity and lack of resolution are based upon their insight into things, and only give proof of their discretion." This is what Pope tells us in a nutshell when he says that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread;" but the thought

deserves the development given it by Holberg, and the public for which he wrote would probably have failed to realize its meaning in the more condensed phrase. For we must not forget that Holberg's mission was to bring enlightenment to minds shut in and darkened to an extent that we can now hardly imagine, and that the most childish superstitions were to him real foes to be overthrown by his lance thrusts.

"Ulysses von Ithacia" is a fantastic jumble of incidents connected with the Trojan war. It opens with the judgment of Paris and closes with the return of the wanderer, treating the material offered by Homer and Virgil in a way that suggests the *libretti* of Offenbach's "La Belle Helène" and "Orphée aux Enfers." It was intended as a parody of a certain type of German comedy then much in vogue, and displays the wildest disregard of all the unities. Repeated attention is called to this fact, as, for example, at the beginning of the second act, where the servant of Ulysses appears upon the stage and thus addresses the audience: "Ei, Ei, how quickly the time passes! We have now come to Troy, which is four hundred miles from our fatherland. If I did not see the town before my eyes, I would think that I was in a German comedy, where one sometimes travels a thousand miles in a single stride, and in one evening grows forty years older than he was before. But there is no mistake about it, for here lies Troy, where I am pointing with my finger. Here it stands, printed in big black letters, 'This is Troy.'" As may be imagined, the story of the Trojan war is handled with little reverence, and its heroes are made the subject of the most extravagant burlesque. "Sganarels Reyse til det Philosophiske Land" (Sganarel's Journey to the Land of the Philosophers) is a one-act extravaganza in which fun is made of the philosophical sects of antiquity. Two other short pieces may be mentioned in this summary of the fantastic group of comedies. In the "Nye-Aars Prologus til en Comoedie" (A New Year's Prologue for a Comedy), produced in 1723, the gods of Olympus discuss the new Danish stage from their respective points of view. Mars, for example, complains that the comedies offer too little action and too

much morality; Cupid, that they say little or nothing about love, and do not invariably end in marriage; Æsculapius, that they make sport of physicians—

> "In every comedy these worthy men you show
> The butt of public mirth. In my time 'twas not so."

Apollo, on the other hand, and Thalia, defend the stage from these attacks, and commend it, with a subservience that we may not like, but which we must accept in Holberg as in Molière, to the gracious attention of the Danish monarch. "Den Danske Comoedies Liigbegiængelse" (The Funeral of the Danish Comedy) is a companion piece to the one just mentioned, and was performed in 1727, when the theatre closed its doors for twenty years. The principal actors of the company appear upon the stage and discuss the situation with a humor that they doubtless found it difficult to affect. Finally, Thalia sums up the history of the theatre, and pathetically describes the straits to which the actors are reduced. The name of the piece is justified by a funeral procession and burial in dumb show.

Closely allied to these fantastic creations are the two comedies "Melampe" and "De Usynlige," (The Invisible Ones) in which the satire, as in "Ulysses," is directed against certain literary tendencies which seemed to the author deserving of ridicule. French tragedy is parodied in "Melampe," which is the only one of the comedies written largely in verse, and whose theme is a family quarrel for the possession of a pet dog. "I have made no attempt to write tragedies," says Holberg in one of his epistles, "nor have I any inclination to do so, for I loathe everything that is affected and stilted. Yet many have thought from the magniloquent scenes in the tragi-comedy called 'Melampe,' as well as from my 'Metamorphosis,' that I am not without fitness for such a task." This too complacent assumption is one of the few instances in which the author's self-esteem gets the better of his judgment. It is difficult to understand how any one could have found in "Melampe" the slightest evidence of Holberg's fitness for tragic or any other sort of po-

etic composition. As for "De Usynlige," it parodies the sentiment of chivalric romance in a most amusing manner.

The popular beliefs of a superstitious age are the object of attack in several of the comedies, and in reading these we are more than usually impressed by the author's deep earnestness. To this charge he recurs again and again with Voltairean persistence, although, unlike Voltaire, he took heed not to collide with religious prejudice. And yet when Holberg held up to ridicule the belief in witchcraft and in compacts with Satan he was treading upon dangerous ground, for these beliefs were firmly held by many of his contemporaries, and "the old pure faith" that he so frequently satirizes included in all seriousness a faith in witches and werewolves, in ghosts and omens, and in broomstick flights to Blocksberg. Not many years before Holberg's birth witches had been burned by hundreds in Germany and Scandinavia, and as late as 1712 were judicially executed in England. The very year in which Holberg wrote his first comedies, a compact with the devil, drawn up in approved form and written in blood, was publicly burned in Copenhagen. These comedies of superstition lose half their meaning unless we view them in the light of an earlier age than ours. Superstitious notions play a considerable part in "Barselstuen" (The Lying-in Room), "Abracadabra," and "Julestue" (The Christmas Games). In "Det Arabiske Pulver" (The Arabian Powder) the impostures of alchemy are exposed, the story being that of a clever rascal who obtains a large sum of money in return for the secret of transmuting baser metals into gold. It is not centuries, but merely years ago, that the action of this comedy was realized in England and America. "Uden Hoved og Hale" (Without Head or Tail) is a comedy which contrasts the two types of excessive credulity and excessive skepticism. The eyes of the credulous man are suddenly opened to the deceptions that have been practised upon him, and he at once flies to the extreme of unbelief, while the skeptic is as suddenly plunged into credulity by an apparition that he takes to be the devil. The lesson inculcated is that we should avoid extremes, and

neither lightly believe nor disbelieve. But the most amusing of the comedies of this class is that entitled "Hexerie" (Witchcraft). In this play we find the old story of the actor who is overheard in the rehearsal of his part, and who is assumed by the hearers to be bent in very fact upon the blood curdling deeds of which he speaks. In the course of the declamation he invokes the devil to his aid, and the horrified listener quickly spreads abroad his discovery. The story grows in the usual way, until it is well understood all over the town that the innocent actor is an adept in the black art. He is overwhelmed with callers who wish to purchase spells and magic potions, and, finding the profession ascribed to him a profitable one, he falls in with their humor, and speedily fills his pockets. Finally he is arrested and brought to trial, and there is an amusing scene of play at cross purposes, for he supposes that he has been arrested merely for debt. The situation is developed with delightful humor until his final explanation sets things to rights.

We must pass over the greater number of Holberg's comedies with the briefest possible comment. Generally speaking, to make use of Ben Jonson's distinction, they present us with humors rather than characters. That is, they belong to the class which includes Jonson's own plays and most of Molière's, as distinguished from the class of which the plays of Shakspere are the unrivaled type. Each character is, as a rule, the embodiment of some one characteristic, not a human being in the creative sense of Shakspere and Scott. But Holberg at his highest, like Molière, transcends this general limitation of his genius, and presents us with a few types of genuine vitality. Reserving these for a more careful consideration, we will now briefly characterize the less important comedies. Best of all, perhaps, among those which depict humors, is the comedy of "Den Stundeslöse" (The Busy Man). Here the chief figure, appropriately named Vielgeschrey, is that of a man who finds so much to do in fussing over affairs of trifling importance that he gets no time for serious matters and no enjoyment out of life. "Den Vægelsindede" (The Fickle-Minded Woman) illus-

trates, and of course exaggerates, the vice of inconstancy, in love as well as in other concerns. In "Jean de France" we have the young dandy returned from Paris with his superficial polish and his scorn of the surroundings of his home. This very superior person pretends to have forgotten his native language, and looks down upon his family and former acquaintances as unworthy to associate with so refined a youth as himself. This particular kind of snob has never been better delineated. "Mester Gert Westphaler; eller, den Meget Talende Barbeer" (Gert Westphaler; or, the Loquacious Barber) is a title that explains itself, as does also "Philosophus udi Egen Indbilding" (The Philosopher in His Own Conceit). In "Jacob von Tyboe" we have the braggart soldier who turns out to be the greatest of cowards, and in "Diderich Menschen-Skraek" we have a hero of similar mould. In the latter case, it is the braggart's wife who puts his boasting to shame. In "Den Honnette Ambition" (The Proper Ambition) the ways of those who seek titles of nobility are satirized, and in "Don Ranudo" (the scene of which is really Denmark, although it pretends to be Spain) the pride of nobility receives its *reductio ad absurdum* in the refusal of the Spanish grandee to rescue his family from actual starvation by contracting a *mésalliance*. In "Pernilles Korte Fröyken-Stand" (Pernille's Brief Young Ladyhood) the action turns upon the desire of a misguided old man to wed a young girl, and in "Den Forvandlede Brudgom" (The Transformed Bridegroom) upon the desire of a similarly misguided old lady to espouse a youthful husband. In all of these comedies intrigue plays a considerable part, and there are a few others that seem to exist almost solely for the sake of the intrigue. These are "Den Ellefte Junii," (The Eleventh of June), "Mascarade" (The Masquerade), "Kildereysen" (A Trip to the Springs), "Den Pantsatte Bondedreng" (The Peasant Boy in Pawn), and "Henrich og Pernille." The last-named comedy is one of the most symmetrically constructed and amusing of all, and deserves a few lines of description. Henrich and Pernille are two servants, and their master and mistress, respectively, are

about to wed. Each sends his servant to his house in town to make the necessary preparations for the wedding, the two houses being opposite one another in the same street. Each servant takes advantage of the opportunity to dress in fine clothes and play master. Being unknown to one another, each takes the other to be a person of quality, and so Henrich pays court to Pernille, who more than meets him halfway. At this juncture, master and mistress appear upon the scene, and various complications ensue. The projected marriage of the servants is carried out, however, and they learn when too late how they have both been fooled.

Thirty of the comedies of Holberg have now been passed in rapid review, leaving but four others for discussion. These four, however, must be considered the most important of all, for in them the author displays his highest powers of humorous satire, his keenest penetration, and his deepest moral earnestness. They are: "Den Politiske Kandstöber" (The Political Pewterer), "Jeppe paa Bierget," "Erasmus Montanus," and "Det Lykkelige Skibbrud" (The Fortunate Shipwreck). In the first of these four plays (which was also one of the first written) we have a humorous delineation of the man who, without any practical experience in the work of government, or any knowledge of political science, boldly discusses questions of public policy, and makes the most grotesque proposals for the welfare of the state. The moral of this comedy finds wider application at the close of the nineteenth century than it could possibly find at the opening of the eighteenth, for politicians of the type of the Hamburg pewterer swarm in every country that has tried the great democratic experiment, and their numbers make them a dangerous force in our modern society, whereas in Holberg's time one might simply laugh at them without fear of their getting an opportunity to put into practice their ignorant or whimsical theories. The pewterer of the comedy is well cured of his budding political ambition by a trick of which he is made the victim. He is informed that he has been made Bürgermeister of the city in recognition of his distinguished abilities, and a number of practical problems are

brought before him for solution. He finds that the actual task of government is a very different thing from vaporing about measures and policies, and is well-nigh distracted by the questions that he is called upon to decide. When he learns that he has been made the subject of a practical joke, his relief is so great that he goes back to his humble trade without a murmur, convinced that nature never intended him for a statesman after all. In "Jeppe paa Bierget" we have the story made familiar to us by the "Induction" to "The Taming of the Shrew." A peasant is found drunk by the wayside, carried to his master's castle, dressed in rich apparel, and made to believe when he awakes that he is a wealthy nobleman. A reversal of the process restores him to his humble position, with only a dreamlike recollection of the brief period of his glory. In the portrayal of this figure Holberg achieved one of his greatest triumphs. It is not so much the drunken humor as the genuine humanity of the peasant that appeals to us, and the springs of pity are tapped no less than the springs of mirth. In "Erasmus Montanus," which Dr. Brandes, the foremost Scandinavian literary critic, goes so far as to call "our deepest work," we have a comedy which is seemingly all fun, yet which has its underlying suggestion of that oldest and deepest of human tragedies with which Tourguénieff dealt in his "Fathers and Sons." The country youth who is sent to Copenhagen for his education, and who comes back to his simple home a pedantic prig, a superior person scorning his family and old-time associates, seems at first merely contemptible, and we enjoy the little discomfitures of his attempted readjustment to conditions he had outgrown. But, petty and almost insufferable as his training has made him, he claims in the end a share of our sympathies as he struggles vainly against the ignorance and superstition of the village, for he is, in some sort, after all, the representative of the intellectual life, and there is something almost tragic in the manner in which he finally succumbs to prejudice, sacrificing the truth to his personal comfort. At first sight one hardly views the work in this aspect, or sees anything besides its boisterous humor;

but these undercurrents of the writer's purpose are felt in subsequent readings, and the dictum of Dr. Brandes is justified.

The significance of "Det Lykkelige Skibbrud," is to be found in the last of the five acts into which this comedy is divided. The intrigue is practically worked out in the first four, and is a good average example of Holberg's craftsmanship. But within the fifth act the author has framed a sort of *apologia pro vita sua*, and a note of earnestness is struck that must arrest the attention. A satirical poet named Philemon has set the whole town by the ears in consequence of the outspokenness of his writings. He has so depicted, one after another, the hypocrisies, the weaknesses, and the vices of his fellow-townsmen, that people of all sorts and conditions think themselves attacked in person, although none has been mentioned by name. Enraged beyond endurance by this satirical fusillade, the enemies of Philemon make a concentrated attempt to revenge themselves. The hapless poet is brought to the bar of justice, and one after another of those who have been outraged by his writings bears witness against him. The fifth act of "Det Lykkelige Skibbrud" takes us to the courtroom, where we listen to the various complaints. A righteous judge hears all the evidence, and pronounces himself in terms that leave us in no doubt that the author's own face is behind the judicial mask. The judgment of the court is as follows: "The world is held in some sort of balance by just such people as those contending in this case. One prevents the world from getting worse; another, from its ever getting any better. If there were no satirists to scourge faults and vices, few men would tread the paths of virtue; if there were no hypocrites to give strength and authority to sin, few men would desert the paths of virtue. I have read all of Monsieur Philemon's writings, and found in them faults and vices depicted under assumed names. He himself denies that he has aimed at anybody in particular, and his accusers cannot prove that he has. Therefore, Monsieur Philemon, do I declare you freed from their accusations. And you accusers, who have shown

by your conduct before this court that if you have not been derided in any of these writings you ought to be, go to your homes, and, instead of bringing suits against worthy people, strive to correct the faults that do you so much discredit."

Viewing the comedies as a whole, and making due allowance for the types and situations transferred by Holberg from earlier writers to his own pages, we cannot fail to be impressed by his display of fertile invention, genuine humor, and exuberant vitality. The work of Molière offers the only close parallel in modern literature, and, frankly admitting that work to be the richer and deeper, we must remember also that the French dramatist produced his comedies under conditions far more favorable to literary production. Holberg not only had to produce literature, but had to create the literary atmosphere, almost the literary language, as well. Back of Molière there were Villon and Ronsard, Rabelais and Montaigne; contemporary with him there were Pascal, LaFontaine, Corneille, Racine, and a host of others. Back of Holberg there was nobody worth mentioning, and he stood almost a solitary figure during his long life. His indebtedness to Molière was doubtless very great, and he acknowledged it with the utmost candor. The influence of Plautus upon his comic production is also noticeable, and is acknowledged with equal frankness. But these admissions do not detract from the greatness of his work. He was ready to receive suggestions from any quarter, but the material he borrowed was moulded into new forms, impressed with the stamp of his peculiar genius, and, what is most important to say, given a distinctly national character. Considered from a broader point of view, the words applied by Matthew Arnold to Heine—

> The Spirit of the world,
> Beholding the absurdity of men—
> Their vaunts, their feats—let a sardonic smile,
> For one short moment, wander o'er his lips—

may be said of Holberg with equal fitness, and sum up the impression that the comedies make upon the critic who looks at them in their relation to universal literature.

We must not forget, however, that the comedies, large as they loom in the history of Danish letters, represent only five or six years of a life prolonged to the scriptural tale, and almost Voltairean in its productiveness. A few words must suffice for the works that occupied Holberg during the years that followed the closing of the national theater. Before the accession of the puritanical Christian VI. to the throne Holberg had made his last European journey, and had published "Metamorphosis," which was an unsuccessful imitation of Ovid, a couple of controversial pieces, and a work called "Dannemarks og Norges Beskrivelse" (Description of Denmark and Norway). These were followed (1732–35) by the important "Dannemarks Riges Historie" (History of the Kingdom of Denmark), which won great popular favor on account of its clear and simple style, and must be reckoned the author's highest achievement as a historian. Other writings of this period were a Latin handbook of universal history, a monograph on Bergen, the author's birthplace, a lengthy history of the Christian Church up to the Reformation, a series of "hero stories" in Plutarch's manner and a corresponding series of "heroine stories," a Jewish history, and the "Opuscula Latina," already mentioned as including Holberg's autobiography.

The most widely known, although by no means the greatest, of Holberg's works was published at Leipzig in 1741, was written in Latin, and bore the title "Nicolai Klimii Iter Subterraneum" (Niels Klim's Underground Journey). It created a marked sensation, and was soon put into Danish, besides being translated into almost every other European tongue. It belongs to the class of books that includes "Utopia" and "Gulliver;" in other words, it is a philosophical romance concealing its didactic purpose under the guise of an imaginary journey to a region hitherto unknown. Its essential aim is to champion the spirit of tolerance in religious and other intellectual concerns, and its publication at a time when Denmark was suffering under a *régime* of intolerant pietism, was a venture that required some courage, and was not undertaken without misgivings. The freedom of thought

and the liberal outlook of which "Niels Klim" offers so abundant witness are likewise conspicuous in the "Moralske Tanker" (Moral Reflections) of 1744. In this book "I have sought," he says, "to combat vulgar errors and distinguish the reality of virtue and vice from the appearance." This work and the five volumes of "Epistler" (1748–54) practically complete the list of Holberg's writings, and embody his ripest thoughts about men and things, about government, literature, philosophy, religion, and the practical conduct of life. If hitherto we have thought of Holberg as the Northern prototype of Molière or Voltaire, he appears to us in his "Epistles" rather in the light of a Northern Montaigne. These brief essays, between five and six hundred in number, afford the most intimate revelation of the author's life and intellectual attitude. They discuss all manner of subjects. To take a few at random, we find essays on the Fall of Man, the Cartesian and Newtonian Physics, Marlborough and Prince Eugene, the Venetian Government, the diseases of cattle, a comparison of Plautus and Terence, the pronunciation of Latin, oysters that grow on trees, dogs and cats, and a defense of the devil. And from first to last they are delightfully genial, characterized by humor, allusiveness, and the most admirable common sense. They close in the worthiest imaginable way the long list of the writings with which for nearly forty years their author continued to enrich the national literature of which he had been the creator.

Nearly twenty years before his death Holberg expressed a determination to devote to public uses the modest fortune that he had accumulated. He had never married, and his simple and retiring mode of life was misunderstood to the extent that he was now and then charged with parsimony and lack of sympathy with his fellow-men. The autobiographical chapters in the "Epistler" are a sufficient answer, if any were needed, to such accusations. "The fortune that I have gathered by toil and sweat I have never held to be really mine, but consider it as belonging to the society in which I live, and in which I should be regarded not as a proprietor, but rather as a treasurer who may be held to account."

After much thought, he decided to apply his fortune to the endowment of Sorö Academy, a sort of auxiliary to the University, and prepared a deed of gift, turning over to that institution his landed property, his library, and a considerable sum of money to be applied in scholarships. The greater part of this gift was made effective several years before his death. In 1747 he received a title of nobility, but as Baron Holberg remained the same conscientious and unaffected citizen that he had been before this honor was bestowed upon him. He accepted the title with simple dignity, as a deserved recognition of his services to the state and the nation, just as in our own day the greatest of modern English poets accepted a similar title for similar reasons. In Holberg's case, as in Tennyson's, this acceptance called forth a certain amount of ill-natured criticism from people who ignored the fact that the honor had been unsought, that it was the expression of a genuine gratitude on the part of the state, and that to have refused it would have been an act of mere boorishness. Having set his affairs in order, he was ready for the last summons, which came near the close of 1753, in the form of an affection of the lungs. When he was told of his danger he said: "It is enough for me to know that I have sought all my life long to be a useful citizen of my country. I will, therefore, die willingly, and all the more so because I perceive that my mental powers are likely to fail me." The end came January 28, 1754, when Holberg had entered upon his seventieth year. His body lies in the church at Sorö, beneath a marble sarcophagus erected a quarter of a century after his death.

The words just quoted strike the prevailing note of Holberg's character. In their unaffected simplicity they reveal the inmost nature of the man. He was simple in his daily life, and simple in his chosen forms of literary expression, abhorring parade in the one as he abhorred pedantry in the other. Few figures of the eighteenth century stand out in as clear a light, and none is more deserving of our respect. In the memory of his own countrymen his place is secure as the greatest of their benefactors. He brought light into

their intellectual darkness, and bestowed upon them their due measure of that "inner freedom," to use Goethe's phrase, that is the most precious of all possessions. He founded no school in the narrow sense, but in the wider sense the whole spiritual life of modern Denmark is traceable to his impulse and indebted to his example. He was not unconscious of his high mission, and even in the lightest of his comedies we may detect the ethical undercurrent. "Ej blot til lyst" (not merely for pleasure) has long been the motto of the Danish National Theatre, and it was in the spirit of that fine phrase that Holberg wrote, not only "Den Danske Skue-Plads," but also the many books of history and allegory, of philosophy and criticism, that occupied his long and industrious days. Denmark may well be proud that such a figure stands in the forefront of its intellectual life.

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